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SOUTH ASIA, A NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

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SOUTH ASIA, A NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

The U S South Asia policy needs to be redirected and refocused. It is time for us to recognize that this long overlooked region requires greater U S attention, and that it presents promising opportunities in the coming century not only for the United States, but also for the world community.

We need to explore the region beyond the presumed constraints, and extend our strategic vision to the plausibility of a conflict-free, economically sound South Asia with reduced threats of nuclear weapons and lessened perils of transnational problems. We begin this process with greater U S involvement in the region by: 1) actively promoting economic reform and market liberalization, 2) prevailing upon India and Pakistan to reduce regional conflict, 3) providing them with concrete incentives for capping nuclear capability, and, 4) impressing upon regional actors to address such other urgent issues as population growth, illicit drug production and trafficking, spread of communicable disease and environmental degradation that threaten the region's socio-economic equilibrium.

CONTEXT

While South Asia holds the promise of greater economic growth and opportunity for foreign investments and market expansion, the region's two predominant powers are burdened with persistent mistrust and hostilities toward each other. As one of the poorest regions in the world, the area not only suffers from over population, famine and environmental degradation, but also is engaged in territorial disputes and the prospect of possible nuclear conflict.

The economy has been improving, but the ruling elites and religious conservatives of India and Pakistan have been resistant to economic reform in fear that foreign influences will affect their cultural value system. This, coupled with poor infrastructure, both physical and financial, make this area less attractive to foreign investors. Energy and water shortages, illicit narcotics production and trafficking and a lingering caste system further hamper the economic development.

The predominant security issue of the area is the long-term territorial dispute over Kashmir. This area near Islamabad has been in dispute since separation of Pakistan from India in 1947 and has diverted attention and resources from more urgent social and economic needs.

Both India and Pakistan possess nuclear capabilities that are not well understood outside the region and pose a potential threat to each other. The governments and populace of both countries believe that the retention of nuclear capabilities is vital to their national security.

The residual effects of the cold war continue to strain U.S. bilateral relations with India. Due to India's support for the Soviet Union during the Afghan war, and U.S. support for Pakistan during that time, there is a lingering perception of U.S. "tilt" toward Pakistan.

THREATS AND CHALLENGES

The threats and challenges to the area are regional unrest, economic stagnation, nuclear proliferation, population growth and societal problems. The primary security threat is the territorial dispute between India and Pakistan in the Kashmir region. The Kashmir area has been the site of several military disputes and has defied bilateral and multilateral attempts at negotiations. The concerns associated with the conflict are that it will be a continual drain on

economic and human resources, that further fighting will break out, or, though less likely, that the situation could escalate into a nuclear exchange

An equally challenging issue is the potential proliferation of nuclear weapons. Adding to the concern of a possible exchange between India and Pakistan are potential theft or loss, lack of adequate command and control, and possible sale of nuclear weapons to a rogue nation. Both countries have refused to sign arms control treaties for non-proliferation and testing.

Economically, despite gradual improvement in the region, ideological resistance to reform in both nations threatens the necessary six to eight percent annual growth rate needed to sustain internal stability. Moreover, nationalists and religious leaders have consistently thwarted measures that would promote rapid economic reform, arguing that an open market system could permit foreign influences on their traditional values.

The population growth rate that outpaces the region's economic capabilities will have a debilitating effect on social systems and internal stability. The devastating effects of environmental degradation, narcotics, and spread of disease have already claimed a considerable toll on the region's material and manpower resources. A case in point was Nepal's rampant deforestation that resulted in recurring floods and typhoons in Bangladesh. This not only caused a serious economic drain on the country, but also had a spillover effect on other areas of the region.

OPPORTUNITIES

Despite the enormous challenges the region faces, South Asia presents an extraordinary potential for U.S. business interests. The growing middle class population, readily available labor force, and developing democracies are attractive to international commercial ventures. The

U S must prevail upon the governments of South Asia to pursue rapid economic reform and market liberalization for the region's economic growth and prosperity The ever increasing energy needs in the region add yet another opportunity for U S technology industry

U. S. NATIONAL INTERESTS AND POLICY OBJECTIVES

The key U S national interests in the region are

- Economic development and market liberalization
- Reduction of regional tension
- Non-proliferation of WMD/means of delivery
- Transnational issues

South Asia has long been considered a non-major area of concern by the U S government It is, however, gaining attention in the international arena for its vast market potential and nuclear capabilities In line with this, the Commerce Department, about five years ago, designated India as one of the ten Big Emerging Markets (BEM) for commercial exploration Open and transparent trade practices for the region are essential for South Asia to become a world market place Our priority policy objective is, therefore, to assist India and Pakistan in developing a sound economic system and an attractive market environment for international trade and investment

Another key policy objective is to reduce tension between India and Pakistan over Kashmir This will significantly decrease the current drain on personnel and monetary resources of both India and Pakistan These resources should then be redirected toward direly needed social and economic programs

Controlling proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is a major U S national security objective that is clearly applicable to South Asia. The WMD concerns in the area are the nuclear capabilities of India and Pakistan. The U S has attempted to prevent the transfer of nuclear weapons technology to various emerging nations such as Pakistan. Our efforts, however, have not prevented Pakistan from gaining a nuclear capability, which she partly achieved through imports from China. (In fact, the U S has increased its efforts toward preventing the transfer of nuclear technology to non-declared states. During the Jiang Zemin visit in October 1997, an agreement was reached to allow sale of U S nuclear reactors to China in exchange for China's promise to stop future nuclear technology sales to other countries.) The current administration continues to certify to Congress that Pakistan has not assembled a nuclear device in order to extend the aid to Pakistan.

India, on the other hand, has a largely indigenous nuclear weapons program. Both India and Pakistan have pursued policies of ambiguity with respect to declaration of their capabilities and participation in arms control regimes. The U S should continue efforts to press for capping the region's nuclear capability by driving for India's and Pakistan's full participation in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Another U S policy objective is to effectively address menacing transnational issues. Enlisting the region's cooperation to halt the production and flow of illicit drugs, to inhibit degradation of the environment and to prevent the spread of disease is an important policy goal. A considerable effort should also be directed to the region's population growth, particularly in Pakistan. Effective family planning programs to control this problem are essential to prevent widespread poverty, violence and illegal migration.

STRATEGY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The United States must acknowledge the potential of the region as a vibrant market place and its strategic role in the Asian Continent. We must pursue greater involvement in the region's economic reform, security, nuclear non-proliferation and transnational concerns.

First, to accelerate the region's trade liberalization and financial infrastructure development process, we should employ multilateral economic instruments of our national security strategy. We should engage international institutions such as the Asia Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank (WB), the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to this end. We should also consider the possibility of providing tax incentives for U.S. firms willing to invest and build necessary infrastructure in the region.

Second, we should pursue means to reduce the threat of regional conflict. To achieve this, the U.S. should actively support India-Pakistan bilateral negotiations, encourage international organizations such as the UN, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to mediate in the Kashmir conflict. At the same time, we should seriously consider offering our support for India's seat in the UN Security Council as a bargaining tool to achieve a peaceful agreement for regional security.

Third, to address the nuclear weapons and other WMD capabilities, the following are possible options:

- Roll Back
- Continue Present Status
- Regional Deterrence and Reassurance

- Declaration and Inspection

Roll Back

The probability of a roll back or denuclearization of both India and Pakistan is extremely low. The 1997 Strategic Assessment Report of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) concluded “India and Pakistan determination to pursue a nuclear deterrent transcends partisan politics in both countries and is an important element of public and political faith”¹. Despite U.S. legislative efforts this course of action has little chance of coming to fruition.

Continue Present Status

This option is probably the most likely to be pursued. The disadvantages of this option are that neither country submits to proliferation or testing regimes of arms control treaties and little information will be gained as to capabilities of the two countries.

Regional Deterrence and Assurance

There is little likelihood of any international organization agreeing to formal treaties to assure the protection of Pakistan and India against external attack. This option would best be pursued with Pakistan rolling back and India retaining a capability to deter China. However, to provide U.S. assurances for Pakistan similar to those provided to support denuclearization of Ukraine would cause the U.S. to continue its perceived “tilt” toward Pakistan and would not be consistent with our intent to recognize the preeminence of India.

Declaration and Agreement to Treaty Compliance

Although a bold step, this option could possibly result in the safest security situation. By coupling treaty compliance, on-site inspection requirements and non-proliferation pledges, the U.S. and international community could offer economic incentives that would allow us to require transparency and implementation of strict safety and security measures. On 31 January 1995,

then Secretary of Defense William J. Perry proposed this course of action. “I recognize that nuclear capabilities in India and Pakistan flow from a dynamic that we are unlikely to influence in the near term. Rather than seeking to roll back – which we have concluded as unattainable in these two countries – we have decided, instead, to seek to cap their nuclear capabilities.”² This option would require legislative action to support economic incentives and to allow sale of U.S. reactors to India. This option is the recommended approach by the writers of this paper.

Finally, we should increase our cooperation in combating transnational threats in the region. We should mobilize international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) to effectively fight against infectious disease with vaccination programs and to curb population growth with family planning programs. We should impel the region’s governments to seriously exercise environmental protection measures to prevent further environmental degradation. We should assist the regional law enforcement organizations to eradicate narcotics production and trafficking activities.

CONCLUSION

It is now time for us to significantly advance U.S. policy objectives in South Asia through greater engagement and a balanced approach toward India and Pakistan. It is imperative to have U.S. policy makers, Congress, and private sectors agree to a cohesive strategy for the region for this purpose. We have proposed in this paper U.S. policy choices toward realizing our stated vision of the region of an improved economy, open market, reduced tensions, nuclear non-proliferation and minimized transnational threats.

¹ *Strategic Assessment 1997*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University 129

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